

TALE XV.

THE sprite said, "O king! there is a mountain named Himāchal, where there is a city of the demi-gods (or celestial musicians); and king Jimūtketu ruled there. Once upon a time he worshipped Kalpabriksh,¹ a great deal for the sake of a son. Thereupon Kalpabriksh was pleased, and said, 'I am pleased at perceiving thy services to me; ask any boon thou desirest.' The monarch replied, saying, 'Grant me a son, so that my kingdom and my name may endure.' It (the tree) said, 'Even so shall it be.'"

"After some time the king had a son. He experienced extreme joy, and held rejoicings with much noise and display. After making numerous presents and charitable gifts, he summoned the priests and fixed on a name for him. The priests named him Jimūt-bāhan. When he became twelve years of age he began to worship Shiva; and having completed the study of all the learned writings, became a very

¹ *Vide note, p. 72.*

intelligent, meditative, resolute, intrepid, and learned man; there was no equal of his in those times. And as many people as dwelt under his sway, all were alive to their respective duties."

"When he attained to manhood, he, too, worshipped Kalpabriksh assiduously; whereupon Kalpabriksh was pleased, and said to him, 'Ask whatsoever thou desirest, I will give it to thee.' On this, Jimūt-bāhan said, 'If you are pleased with me, take away all poverty from my subjects, and let all those who dwell in my dominions become equal in point of possessions and riches.' When Kalpabriksh granted the boon, all became so well off by the possession of wealth, that no one would obey the order of any person, and no one would do work for any one."

"When the subjects of that realm became such as has been described, the brothers and kinsfolk of the king began to reason together, saying, 'Both father and son are completely under the influence of religion, and the people do not obey their commands; it is therefore best to seize and imprison the pair of them, and take their kingdom from them.' In fine, the king was not on his guard against them; and they having plotted together, went with an army and surrounded the king's palace."

"When this news reached the king, he said to his son, 'What shall we do now?' The prince said, 'Your majesty! you be pleased to abide here in peace; I will away and destroy them this instant.' The king

said, 'O son! this body is frail, and riches, too, are unabiding; when a man is born, death, too, attends him; hence we should now give up dominion, and practise religious duties. It is not right to commit a heinous sin for the sake of such a body, and for the sake of a kingdom; for even king Yudhishthir experienced remorse after his great war with the descendants of Bharat.' On hearing this, his son said, 'So be it! make over the government to your kinsmen, and you yourself depart and practise religious austerities.'"

"Having resolved on this, and summoned his brothers and nephews, and handed over the government to them, father and son both ascended the mountain Malayāchal, and on reaching the summit, built a hut and dwelt there. A friendship arose between Jimūt-bāhan and a holy sage's son. One day the king's son and the son of the sage went out together for a stroll on the top of the mountain. A temple, sacred to Bhawānī, came in sight there. Within the temple, a princess, with a lute in her hands, was singing in front of the goddess. The eyes of the princess and those of Jimūt-bāhan met, and both became smitten with love. But the princess, restraining her feelings, and stricken with shame, turned her steps homeward; and he, too, for his part, being put to shame by the presence of the sage's son, came to his own place. That night was passed by both the lovers (*lit.* rose-cheeked ones) in extreme restlessness."

"As soon as morn appeared, the princess set out

from her quarter, for the temple of Devī, and the prince, too (starting from this side), no sooner arrived than he perceived that the princess was there. Then he asked her female companion, 'Whose daughter is she?' The companion said, 'She is the daughter of king Malayketu; her name is Malayāvati, and she is a virgin as yet.' After saying this, the companion (spoke) again (and) asked the prince, 'Say, handsome man! whence have you come? and what is your name?' He replied, 'I am the son of the monarch of the demi-gods, whose name is Jimūt-ketu; and my name is Jimūt-bāhan. In consequence of our Government being overthrown, we, father and son, have come and taken up our abode here.'"

"Again, the companion, after hearing these words, related all to the princess. She was much pained at heart on hearing them, and returned home; and at night she lay down with a load of care on her mind. But her companion perceiving this state of her's, disclosed the story to her mother. The queen, on hearing it, mentioned it to the king, and said, 'Your majesty! your daughter has become marriageable; why do you not seek a husband for her?' On hearing this, the king thought the matter over in his mind, and that very moment summoned his son Mitrāvasu, and said, 'Son! seek a husband for your sister and bring him here.' Then he spoke, saying, 'The king of the demi-gods, Jimūt-ketu by name, and whose son is named Jimūt-bāhan, having abandoned his king-

dom, has, I hear, come here with his son.' On hearing this, king Malay-ketu said, 'I will give the girl to Jimūt-bāhan.'"

"Having said this, he bade his son go and bring Jimūt-bāhan from the king's. He, on receipt of the king's command, set out for that house, and, on arriving there, said to the father, 'Let your son accompany me, as my father has sent for him to bestow his daughter upon him.' On hearing this, king Jimūt-ketu sent his son along with him, and he came here (to King Malay-ketu's house). Then King Malay-ketu celebrated his marriage Gandharb fashion. When his marriage had taken place, he brought the bride and Mitrāvasu with him to his own house. Then the three of them paid their respects to the king, and the king also gave them his blessing. Thus did that day pass."

"On the morrow's morn, however, the two princes went out, as soon as they rose, to take a walk on that mountain of Malayāgir.¹ On reaching the place, what does Jimūt-bāhan perceive but a very lofty heap of something white. Thereupon he questioned his brother-in-law, saying, 'Brother! how is it that this white heap is seen here?' He replied, 'Millions of

¹ This mountain has already been called Malayāchal; the change of name is merely apparent, however, for *achal* and *giri* both signify *hill* or *mountain*; Malayā is the actual name. It is a mountain south of the Narbada, and is made famous in Sanskrit poetry for the cool southerly breeze which always prevails there.

young *nāgs* (or serpents with human faces) come here from the infernal regions; these *Garur*¹ comes and devours; this heap is composed of their bones.' On hearing this, Jimūt bāhan said to his brother-in-law, 'Friend! you go home (alone) and take your food; for I always engage in worship at this hour, and the time for me to worship has now arrived.'"

"On hearing this, he did go; and Jimūt-bāhan having advanced further, the sound of weeping began to reach him. When, continuing his advance in the direction of the sound of the voice, he reached the spot, what does he behold but an old woman weeping with the burden of her trouble. He went up to her and asked, 'Why weepst thou, mother?' Thereupon she said, 'To-day comes the turn of the serpent Sankhchūr, who is my son; Garur will come and eat him up; it is on account of this trouble that I weep.' He said, 'O mother! weep not; I will give up my life in lieu of thy son's.' The old woman said, 'Pray do not so! *thou* art my (son) Sankhchūr.'"

"She was saying this, when, at that moment, Sankhchūr arrived; and hearing (her words), said, 'Your majesty! worthless wretches like myself are born and die in vast numbers; but a just and com-

¹ *Garur* is a gigantic bird with a human face, said to be the vehicle of Vishnū. He is the elder brother of Indra, being the produce of the second egg laid by Banitā. This will account for Garur's possessing the power to bring nectar from the nether regions.

passionate being like you is not born every day (*lit.* every hour); do not, therefore, sacrifice your life for mine; for, thousands of human beings will be benefited by your remaining alive; whereas it makes no difference whether I live or die.' Then Jīmūt-bāhan said, 'It is not the way of true men to say (that they will do a thing) and (then) not to do it. Go thou whence thou camest.'"

"When he heard this, Shankhchūr, for his part, went to pay adoration to Devī, and Garuṛ descended from the sky. In the meantime, the prince perceived that each leg of his was as long as four bamboos, and his beak was as long as a palm-tree, his belly like a mountain, his eyes like gates, and his feathers like clouds. All at once he rushed with open beak upon the prince. The first time the prince saved himself; but the second time he flew off with him in his beak, and began wheeling upwards in the air. While this was going on, a bracelet, on the jewel of which the prince's name was engraved, became unfastened, and fell, all covered with blood, before the princess. She fell down in a swoon at the sight of it."

"When, after a few minutes, she recovered her senses, she sent word of all that had happened to her father and mother. They came (to her) on hearing of this calamity, and on seeing the ornament covered with blood, burst into tears. Now, the three of them set out in quest (of him), and, on the road, Shankhchūr too joined them, and advancing beyond them, went

to the place where he had seen the prince, and began calling out repeatedly, saying, 'O Garuṛ! let him go! let him go! He is not thy food. *My* name is Shankhchūr. I am thy food.'"

"On hearing this, Garuṛ descended in alarm, and thought to himself, 'I have eaten either a Brahman or a Kshatri; what is this I have done!' After this, he said to the prince, 'O man! tell me truly; why art thou giving up thy life?' The prince replied, 'O Garuṛ! trees cast their shade over others; and while they themselves stand in the sun, blossom and bear fruit for the benefit of others. Such is the character of good men and trees. What is the advantage of this body if it do not come of use to others? The saying is well known that, 'The more they rub sandal-wood, the more it gives out its perfume; and the more they go on peeling the sugar-cane, and cutting it up into pieces, the more does its flavour increase; and the more they pass gold through the fire, the more surpassingly beautiful does it become. Those who are noble do not give up their natural qualities even on losing their lives. What matters it whether men praise them or blame them? What matters it whether riches abide with them or not? What does it signify whether they die this moment, or after a length of time? The men who walk in the path of rectitude place not their feet in any other path, happen what may. What matters it

whether they are fat or lean? In fact, his living is bootless whose body proves of no benefit (to anyone); while those who live for the good of others—their living is advantageous. To live for the mere sake of living, is the way in which dogs and crows, even, cherish life. Those who lay down their lives for the sake of a Brahman, a cow, a friend, or a wife, nay, more, for the sake of a stranger, assuredly dwell in paradise for ever.’”

“Garuṣ said, ‘Everyone in the world cherishes his own life; and scarce, indeed, are those in the world who lay down their own lives to save the lives of others.’ After saying this, Garuṣ added, ‘Ask a boon; I am pleased with thy courage.’ On hearing this, Jīmūt-bāhan said, ‘O god! if you are pleased with me, then henceforth eat no more serpents, and restore to life those you have eaten.’ On hearing this, Garuṣ brought the water of life from the infernal regions, and sprinkled it over the bones of the serpents, so that they rose up alive again. And he said to him (the prince), ‘O Jīmūt-bāhan, by my favour thy lost kingdom will be restored to thee.’”

“After granting this boon, Garuṣ departed to his own abode, and Sankhchūr also went home; and Jīmūt-bāhan too left the place, and met his father-in-law and mother-in-law and wife on the road. Then he came in their company to his father. When they heard of these circumstances, his uncle and cousins,

and indeed all his kinsfolk, came to visit him, and after falling at his feet (to implore forgiveness), took him away, and placed him on the throne.”

After relating so much of the story, the sprite asked, “O king! whose virtue was greatest among these?” King Bir Vikramājīt replied, “Sankhchūr’s.” “How so?” asked the sprite. The king said, “Sankhchūr, who had gone away (and so, got safe off,) returned to give up his life, and saved him (the prince) from being eaten by Garuṣ.” The sprite said, “Why was not the virtue of him greatest, who laid down his life for another?” The king replied, “Jīmūt-bāhan was a *Kshatrī* by caste. He was accustomed to holding his life in his hand, and hence he found it no hard matter to sacrifice his life.” On hearing this, the sprite went again and hung on to that tree; and the king, having gone there and bound him, placed him on his shoulder, and carried him off.